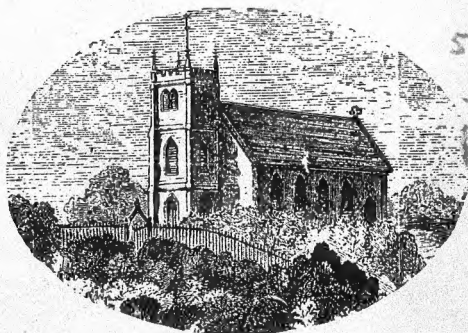


Pioneer Days in the Western Church

*The Early History of the Anglican
Province of Rupert's Land*



— By —

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in St. John's College, Winnipeg.*

Author of "Jack of All Trades," "The New
Universities," "Paper Aeroplanes," etc.

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Pioneer Days in the Western Church



IN THE vestry of St. John's Cathedral there hangs a small water-colour painting. Its subject does not seem very exciting, and its perspective is awry.

It represents a couple of wooden shacks beside a wide river; in front of the shacks there walks a rather queerly-dressed gentleman who with his left hand takes the hand of a boy and with his right holds out a book before him. There it is, the open country, the river, the small wooden buildings, the man, and—rather significantly—the boy. Underneath the picture is a title in German which has been translated, "The English Minister's House on the Red River. Drawn from Nature in the Year 1822."

It is a humble picture and it was a humble building. Yet the importance of that building for the whole future of Western Canada is beyond man's reckoning.

Governor Semple, who fell in the Seven Oaks massacre, wrote in 1815: "I have trodden the burnt ruins of houses, barns, a mill, a fort, and sharpened stockades, but none of a place of worship, even upon the smallest scale. I blush to say that over the whole extent of the Hudson's Bay territories no such building exists."

Pioneer Days in the Western Church

Nor was there any school. But in 1820 a young Essex curate with the symbolic name of John West sailed for Hudson's Bay and the Red River Colony. He came in a double capacity, as missionary of the Church Missionary Society and Chaplain of the Hudson's Bay Company. He was English and Anglican. The Protestant Christians of the Settlement were mostly Scots and Presbyterian. But they received him well—and for 30 years Presbyterians had to be content with Anglican ministrations

DID John West realize the greatness of the task he had performed? He had set up his little church and school on the banks of the Red River and given to them the name of St. John's. It was—at a very rough computation—600 miles to Hudson Bay. It was 800 miles to the Rocky Mountains. It was 1,400 miles to the nearest point on the Arctic Ocean. It was 2,000 miles to the Yukon. Yet to all these points and beyond the Gospel was to travel from St. John's.

"It is as large as all Russia," said the "Colonial Church Chronicle" 20 years later when it was describing the newly formed Diocese of Rupert's Land. Wherever traders could go there missionaries would find their way. Beyond the reach of the white man's commerce, to the far neighbourhood of the magnetic pole, the Christian news was carried. From the site of the little hut built on the river side the Gospel was to be carried farther probably than from any other point on the inhabited globe. It is no wonder

Pioneer Days in the Western Church

that men speak of St. John's Cathedral as the Canterbury of the North-west.

John West was in the country for three years—though later he did missionary work among the Indians in the Maritime provinces and Upper Canada—but the work he had begun, Christian and educational, went on. The Rev. D. Jones was sent out by the Church Missionary Society in 1823, and upon his being appointed a Chaplain to the Hudson's Bay Company, William Cockran was sent out in 1825.

Archdeacon Cochrane (it seems that as an ecclesiastical dignitary he modernized the spelling of his name) is the best remembered of all the early missionaries, for he gave his whole life to the work and lies buried by the riverside at his own St. Andrew's. It is still an old timer's delight to tell stories of the Archdeacon. He was a hale and burly Northumbrian who was doubtless well equipped to guide and rule his Scottish parishioners—to say nothing of the Indians whom he evangelized and civilized. He described himself as at one and the same time "minister, clerk, schoolmaster, arbitrator, peacemaker and agricultural director." He is as much remembered on horseback as in the pulpit. Most of all he is remembered as a church builder.

BY 1831 there were three parishes in the Red River Settlement—St. John's or "Upper Church," St. Paul's or "Middle Church," and St. Andrew's or "Lower Church." In 1833 St. Peter's Dynevor was

Pioneer Days in the Western Church

established as an Indian mission on the river north of the present Selkirk. St. John's was rebuilt in 1834. St. Peter's knew a wooden church in 1830, replaced by the present stone structure in 1853. That year the Archdeacon moved to Portage la Prairie and began his church building there. The present St. Andrew's was consecrated in December, 1849, and is Archdeacon Cochrane's greatest monument.

The parish was a rendezvous for retired Hudson's Bay company's officers and men. To its rector's doors Indians from the interior constantly found their way to hear the new thing that was so much talked about. One can hardly enter the church today without feeling something of the spring wonder of those early times.

The worshipper still can sit in the old pews and kneel upon an aged piece of buffalo hide. The tower still stands beside the river and dominates the whole countryside. It is a monument of faith. The men who built it had travelled thousands of miles in dangerous ways, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by their own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, and then with scant tools and little expert advice they built this great church, a monument to God. They hewed their own boards, they cut their own stone; of buffalo skin they made their kneelers. Archdeacon Cochrane describes the meeting that was held in December, 1844, to make plans for the building.

Pioneer Days in the Western Church

"Silver and gold they had none; but stones, lime, shingles, boards, timber and labour were cheerfully contributed, and to such an amount as perfectly astonished me. The shingle-makers proposed to give 10,000 shingles each, and the lime burners 400 bushels of lime each. The mason proposed to dress the stones for one corner, and lay them, gratis. Boards and timber were promised in the same liberal manner. One black curly-head, descended from the line of Ham by his father's side, said 'I shall give ten pounds.'

"The eyes of all were turned toward him, and a smile played upon every countenance. I said, 'I believe our brethren think you are too poor to raise such a sum.' He said, raising his arm, 'Here is my body: it is at your service. It is true, I can neither square a stone nor lay one; but there will be the floor and roof; turn me to them, and you will see, if God give me life and health, that the value of the sum shall be raised.' In materials and labor above seven hundred pounds were promised."

IN all his time there was no bishop in the west. But the Church in "Canada" was beginning to be interested in its distant western neighbour beyond the Lakes. In 1844, Bishop Mountain, of Quebec, made his famous canoe trip to Red River Settlement. An oil painting of the bishop on his way, hangs in the present Bishop's court. He was not only the first bishop to visit Rupert's Land; he was also the first clergyman to reach it by way of the Lakes rather than by way of

Pioneer Days in the Western Church

the Bay. The first point at which he touched was St. Peter's Dynevor, and his own journal tells the graphic story.

They had rowed all the previous night in a rainstorm. "It was about nine o'clock, and within half an hour of the time for the commencement of divine service, on Sunday, June 23, that we reached the Indian settlement, forming the lower extremity of the Red River colony. The sight which greeted me was such as never can be forgotten by myself or my companions. . . . After travelling for upward of a month through an inhospitable wilderness, and casually encountering, at intervals, such specimens of the heathen savage as I have described, we came at once, and without any immediate gradation in the aspect of things, upon the establishment formed upon the low margin of the river, for the same race of people in their Christian state; and there, on the morning of the Lord's own blessed day, we saw them gathering already around their pastor, who was before his door; their children collecting in the same manner, with their books in their hands, all decently clothed from head to foot . . .

"Around were their humble dwellings, with the commencement of farms, and cattle grazing in the meadows; the neat modest parsonage, or mission-house, with its garden attached to it; and the simple but decent church, with the schoolhouse as its appendage. . . . We were amply rewarded for all the toils and exposures of the night . . . My servant, an Englishman, to whom everything

Pioneer Days in the Western Church

in this journey was new, told me afterwards that he could hardly command his tears. . . . We were greeted by good Mr. Smithurst at the water's edge; and after having refreshed ourselves and robed under his roof, we proceeded to the church. There were perhaps 250 Indians present, composing the whole congregation. Nothing can be more reverential than the demeanour and bearing of these people in public worship."

Not only did the bishop bring cheer and strength from the church in the East to the struggling missions of the West—as his successors have done today—but he also materially strengthened the little band of clergy on the river. Rev. John Smithurst had come out in 1839 to take over the Indian work at Dynevor. In 1841 Rev. Abraham Cowley took charge at Middlechurch. But Mr. Cowley was not in priest's orders; he was ordained priest by Bishop Mountain in 1844. He is known to a later day as Archdeacon Cowley—a pioneer missionary at Fort Cumberland, on the Saskatchewan river, and at Fairford. For some years John McCallum had been in charge of the school at St. John's. His ordination by Bishop Mountain made a welcome addition to the ministerial staff in the colony.

Bishop Mountain was back at Lachine on August 14, 1844. That same month the Rev. J. Hunter—later to be known as Archdeacon Hunter—reached Fort York on Hudson Bay, and after a tedious journey of 30 days arrived at The Pas, where he began his ministrations by the baptism of 31 adults and 37 children.

Pioneer Days in the Western Church

BISHOP MOUNTAIN'S visit convinced him of the necessity of a resident bishop in Rupert's Land. He closed his letters to the Church Missionary Society in England with a strong appeal to this end. "A move should be made at once—an earnest, a determined move—with the eye of faith turned up to God, the heart lifted in the fervency of prayer, and the hand put to the work without looking back." Moreover such a move was becoming financially possible.

In 1838, James Leith, a Scots gentleman who had been a chief factor of the Hudson's Bay Company, bequeathed £12,000 to be expended for missionary purposes in Rupert's Land. By a later decree of the English Court of Chancery this money was invested for the endowment of a Bishopric of Rupert's Land. It is said that the judge who granted this decree was influenced largely by the fact that the Hudson's Bay Company bound themselves in perpetuity to contribute £300 per annum to the bishop's stipend. These two sums thus made the original endowment of the bishopric, and, in our own troublous times, these sums are undisturbed.

On May 29, 1849, an event took place in England's Mother Church that was of supreme importance for the Mother Church of the western land. Bishops were consecrated for Victoria in Hong Kong and for Rupert's Land. It was the first consecration of bishops that had taken place at Canterbury since the year 1570.

David Anderson, the newly chosen bishop for the West, made haste to reach his new

Pioneer Days in the Western Church

sphere, his diocese that was as large as all Russia. The missionary society almost complained that if he had stayed longer in England he would have been able to collect more money for his work.

He was at York Fort on August 29, and on October 3 had reached Red River Settlement, to take up his first residence at Lower Fort Garry. On December 19 he consecrated St. Andrew's church, and held his first ordination. A year later he ordained the first Indian clergyman, Henry Budd, who, as a boy 30 years before, had been taken up by John West. His baptismal name was taken from that of West's old vicar in Essex, a practice which accounts for many Indian names today.

On Christmas Day, 1850, Budd preached his first sermon on the text, "The dayspring from on high hath visited us." He worked among the tribes of Saskatchewan for a quarter of a century. The news from St. John's was spreading.

THE arrival of a bishop naturally gave a great impetus to the church life of the diocese. It was a sad coincidence that on the day of Bishop Anderson's arrival occurred the death of Rev. John McCallum, who so long had been headmaster of the Red River Academy, St. John's. The bishop himself immediately went to work there; he changed its name to St. John's College and gave to it its motto, "In Thy light shall we see light." He intended it to be not only a boys' school but the training college for the ministry, and

Pioneer Days in the Western Church

the centre of higher education that it has subsequently become.

In 1850 the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel took its first interest in the diocese and established the parish of St. James, on the Assiniboine. The Rev. W. H. Taylor, who was its rector, was soon writing vivid letters home of the floods of 1852. Those floods were a disaster to all the dwellers on the river side. Bishop Anderson was now living at Bishop's Court. When the floods rose, the domestic staff left the building by the upper storey windows.

Expansion was the order of the day. Already Archdeacon Hunter was carrying the message as far as Fort Simpson, on the Mackenzie river. In the spring of 1850, Bishop Anderson visited Henry Budd, whom he was shortly to ordain, at the Cumberland mission on the Saskatchewan. In the following winter he looked up Mr. Cowley, at Fairford. And in 1852 he made a canoe trip of 1,200 miles to Moose Factory on Hudson Bay. Here he ordained John Horden, who had come out from England to work on the Bay, and who was later to become the first bishop of Moosonee. Upon Archdeacon Hunter's return from the north, the Rev. W. W. Kirkby, who had been sent out as a schoolmaster by the Church Missionary Society to the Red River, hurried forward to take his place. Ten years later he had reached the Yukon.

The news of this venture so stirred a missionary meeting at St. Andrew's, on the Red river, that a young man, Robert McDonald, a student at St. John's, later to be Arch-

Pioneer Days in the Western Church

deacon of the Yukon, pressed forward to the service. Late in that same year of 1862 he too reached the Yukon.

WHEN Bishop Anderson returned to England in 1865, he read from an English pulpit a letter he had received from Fort Simpson. The writer, McDonald, said that he was dying and begged that a successor might be sent.

"Who will go?" exclaimed the bishop.

A young Lincolnshire clergyman walked into the vestry and said, "I will go."

It was William Carpenter Bompas, who was soon to be the most famous of Arctic missionaries and bishops. He went in haste, reached McDonald in six months and found him restored to health, and, after 40 years' work within the Arctic Circle, died before him.

At Bishop Anderson's retirement, things were going ahead upon the river. His cathedral had been rebuilt. The new one was the "old St. John's" so many still remember. Already he could look upon it as "the Mother Church of the scattered churches of our Lord."

"The time may come," he prophesied, "as civilization advances and strangers flock in, when this structure shall give place to another, more befitting its name, and more harmonizing in architecture and proportion with those time-honoured cathedrals which are the glory of other lands, and even with those already erected on this continent."

There were now more than 20 clergy in

Pioneer Days in the Western Church

the diocese. All of them, whether parish priests or missionaries, were supported by English church societies, principally the Church Missionary Society, which was responsible for 17. Unfortunately, in Bishop Anderson's last years on the river, for a variety of causes, St. John's College had ceased to function. It was to be given new and vigorous life by his successor.

"Every schoolboy knows" that Bishop Anderson was succeeded by Bishop — afterwards Archbishop—Machray, and that to this day the whole form of the Anglican witness in Western Canada is due to the influence of his vigorous and fertile mind. His was a time when the country was rapidly filling up with settlers. Previously the work away from the Red River had been mainly among the Indians; wherever traders could go there missionaries must find their way. But soon a new objective was set out: wherever white men settled there must be placed Christian ministrations.

This constitutes that "struggle for the missions" upon which the Archbishop expended his greatest energies. From that struggle emerged our modern ecclesiastical map. West was the planter of a mission, Cockran was the builder of churches, Anderson the setter up of a bishopric, but Machray was the maker of dioceses, an educational statesman and the builder of an ecclesiastical empire.

ROBERT MACHRAY was a Scotsman and a mathematician, a graduate of Aberdeen and a Cambridge wrangler, a fellow also

Pioneer Days in the Western Church

of his college, Sidney Sussex. He was young and vigorous; just 34 years old at his consecration in 1864. He brought a new day to Rupert's Land, and it was fitting that he should come out in a new way. The Hon. Sheriff Inkster has told the story of how he met the new bishop at St. Cloud, in Minnesota, in the autumn of 1865, with horses and carts to make the fortnight's journey to St. John's.

"I shall never forget the first impression the bishop made on me. Although I was only a lad I could see he was no ordinary man. He was tall and thin, with a jet-black beard and piercing black eyes."

On October 13 the little bells were ringing at St. John's and its new bishop was lodged at Bishop's Court.

As one turns the browned old printed pages of missionary magazines one can recapture something of the vigour of the young don who had come to the West. The "Colonial Church Chronicle" of July, 1866, records, "The Bishop of Rupert's Land has recently completed a visitation tour over more than a thousand miles across the snow. His Lordship, in a letter from Bishop's Court, Red River Settlement, speaks in terms of high satisfaction of the efforts made since his arrival to get the people to do something for themselves, which, he observes, were succeeding beyond their expectation. They had the weekly offertory established in all the ten churches of the settlement, and in one of the missions in the interior.

Pioneer Days in the Western Church

"The bishop was about to hold a conference, at the end of May, of the licensed clergy of the diocese, and two lay delegates from each of the four parishes of the settlement, preliminary to the calling of the first synod of Rupert's Land. His Lordship also contemplates the resuscitation of St. John's College, for educating catechists and teachers for the missions, and these again as clergymen—as well as for giving a general education. The bishop considers such an institution an absolute necessity, and, if successful, the greatest boon that could be conferred on the country.

"I shall," he adds, "be prepared to take part in the theological instruction, or, if necessary, part of the general course of instruction myself." And he did! Many years later railway conductors would come upon His Grace, the Archbishop, in their trains, busily correcting a pile of Greek exercises or mathematical examples.

It is to be wondered whether, after the first bell-ringing ceased, the clergy of the diocese were not a little disconcerted by the vigour of their new chief, with his mind so full of schemes and plans. Before the conference had met on May 30, 1866, the bishop laid his schemes for college and school.

"Not only the intelligence of a people, but their morality and character depend very much on the education they receive. Nothing grieved me more in the condition in which I found the settlement than the state of the schools; and the further experience I have

Pioneer Days in the Western Church

since acquired of the missions in the interior has only increased my sense of the unsatisfactory state in which education is throughout the country. In several parishes of the settlement, including the cathedral parish, there is no teaching whatever."

SO St. John's College was set on foot once more as "a college for theology and general education." Rev. John McLean, a fellow Aberdonian, and later to be first Bishop of Saskatchewan, was appointed as theological tutor and warden. "For third master I hope to have Mr. Pritchard," who was then running a school at St. Paul's, Middlechurch, "by which means we should incorporate his establishment with the college. The second master will be from England, if possible from the University of Cambridge. . . . One great difficulty in our way at the outset is the insufficiency of buildings. I propose, however, to do the best with the present material—raising the back building of St. John's College and adding a kitchen. For this I have prepared a supply of wood, as otherwise the season for obtaining it would have passed. The old buildings at St. John's must be removed, as they are quite uninhabitable. The house at St. Cross will have to be put in order. My own house at Bishop's Court may be turned to some service."

WITH such words and such plans he stabbed the rather lackadaisical settlers into action. No detail seemed too small for his attention. Every mail carried appeals to England for funds to carry on the work

Pioneer Days in the Western Church

that had been so bravely begun. In the Colonial Church Chronicle, for September, 1867, the tale is carried on.

"We have been requested to give publicity to an appeal of the Bishop of Rupert's Land for help, that he may place on a permanent footing the college for training a native ministry, which he has recently established in his diocese. His diocese, stretching as it does, from Canada to British Columbia and the ci-devant Russian possessions, is of such an extent that one of the clergy is actually 3,000 miles from the bishop's residence. The bishop is convinced that the only effective way of accomplishing his work is by the agency of a trained body of native clergy and catechists.

"To secure this agency steps have been taken towards the establishment of a training college . . . The college has been opened and the bishop writes: 'In the senior theological classes there are four students. I take Ecclesiastical History, and the warden, Archdeacon McLean, takes what may be called Doctrinal or Systematic Divinity.'

"In the Collegiate school there are 26 pupils. . . . The school discipline is very good. We struggle against very defective buildings, but we have to do the most with what we have. I am very anxious to get the care of the warden's stipend off my mind, and some stability given to the college. I know the merely moral effect of an endowment would be good, as giving a sense of reality and permanence to the whole. I send by this

Pioneer Days in the Western Church

post £450 to Montreal—the first-fruits of this diocese to the church—half for investment for the Church Endowment fund, half for a Cochrane scholarship at St. John's College."

So the building-up of endowments had begun. All his life he was hard at the work. It came from many sources; from the great church societies in England; from rich benefactors in England; from collections on the Red River and again from collections in England. A Cambridge man is proud to note how many Cambridge church collections went to swell the sum. The archbishop later recalled with pleasure the first gift that came for the chair of Systematic Theology.

"It was one hundred pounds, the result of a missionary basket by the ladies of the little parish of Newton, near Cambridge, which I served for three years before I became vicar of Madingley."

IN all this story there has been no mention so far of Winnipeg. But when the new bishop arrived at St. John's in 1865, Sheriff Inkster records that "we crossed the Assiniboine river, passed under the walls of Fort Garry, and through the little hamlet rising round the fort, now the great and growing City of Winnipeg." In the financial appendix to the report of the bishop's first conference in 1866, among the gifts recorded is one of five pounds from Rev. J. Chapman, specially earmarked "For a chapel at Winnipeg town."

It gives one a nice sense of historical development to realize that the first contribu-

Pioneer Days in the Western Church

tion for the first church in Winnipeg came from the incumbent of Poplar Point and High Bluff! And the first church to be organized in the future city was organized—as were so many later—as a mission point from St. John's, served by the college and cathedral staff.

In 1867 Archdeacon McLean, warden of St. John's College, began to take services in the old court house near the Fort Garry gates, moving later to the "Red River Hall" near the corner of Portage ave. and Main st. The next year the congregation built a church at the corner of Portage ave. and Garry st. On Nov. 4, 1868, the first Holy Trinity was opened for divine service.

Not only was a daughter church at Winnipeg born of the mother church at St. John's. Daughter dioceses were crowding to be born. The bishop emerged with an enhanced reputation as a leader and shepherd of his people after the alarms and excursions of the Riel Rebellion.

In 1870 Manitoba became a province of the Dominion of Canada. The bishop foresaw that this would prove the beginning of a great increase in the population of the West; he wrote to the Church Missionary Society as to the possibility of the division of his enormous diocese. He advocated the immediate formation of two "Northern Missionary Bishoprics," one for the missions in the far north on the east side of Rupert's Land, the other for those in the far north on the west side.

Pioneer Days in the Western Church

IN 1872, John Horden was consecrated in London as Bishop of Moosenee. In 1873 Mr. Bompas arrived travel-stained at the Red River on his way home to England to try to persuade the Church Missionary Society not to let him be made a bishop—an endeavour that was unsuccessful.

The famous story tells that when he arrived at Bishop's Court Machray was busy. The servant who came to the door mistook him for a tramp and told him that his master must not be disturbed. But the stranger was so insistent that the servant went to tell the bishop that a tramp was at the door determined to see him.

"He is hungry, no doubt," replied Machray; "take him into the kitchen and give him something to eat."

Bompas was ushered in and a plate of soup was set before him—but all the time he urged that he might see the master of the house whose hospitality he was enjoying. Hearing the talk, and wondering who this insistent visitor might be, the bishop appeared in the doorway.

"Bompas!" he cried, "is it you?" as he rushed forward to meet the missionary who had journeyed 3,000 miles to see him.

On May 3, 1874, in St. Mary's, Lambeth, William Carpenter Bompas was consecrated first Bishop of Athabasca. In June he was back at the Red River with his new bride, where he found the boat "moored just below St. John's College," that was to take them on their long journey northwards to

Pioneer Days in the Western Church

the Arctic. With Bompas was also consecrated Archdeacon McLean, the first warden of St. John's College, and the first priest in charge of Holy Trinity, to be the first Bishop of Saskatchewan. It was Machray who had persuaded the Church Missionary Society to set up the two dioceses in the north. It was Machray who set about obtaining the endowment for the new bishopric of Saskatchewan. And all the while he was gathering sums of money, large and small, for the sure establishment of his college and his cathedral. In 1874 the Dean and Chapter of the cathedral was set up—though the bishop himself was for a long time dean. The dean and canons of the cathedral were to be the professors in the college. The canons were to be learned. The professors were to be holy.

THE story of later years can only be told in tabulated form. Yet each fact but underlines the mental grasp and vigour of the great leader. The struggle for the missions went on unceasingly. As settlers poured into the country a valiant attempt was made to supply them with churches and with clergy. Students from the college would travel the length of England to a week-end mission. Nursling parishes in the new city were tended for the most part first by the clergy from the centre at St. John's before they were sufficiently established to support their own priests.

The great diocese was divided again and again. Mackenzie river and Qu'Appelle date

Pioneer Days in the Western Church

from 1884, Calgary from 1888, Yukon from 1891 and Keewatin from 1901. (Later still, in 1913 were founded the dioceses of Edmonton and Brandon. The year 1932—the year of depression and disaster—has seen a new diocese established, and endowed with English money, in northern Saskatchewan). In 1883 the new St. John's College building was set up. In 1875 Bishop Machray had become metropolitan of the province of Rupert's Land, but he did not then take the title of archbishop.

When the question of the reorganization of the Church of England in Canada was mooted, it was to Machray that men naturally turned, and turning to him they turned also to the new and vigorous city of Winnipeg, in the very heart of the Dominion. It was at the Winnipeg conference in 1890, held in St. John's College, that the work was done. It is significant that it was here, less than a quarter of a mile from the point where the "English minister's house" stood in 1822, that the whole Anglican Church in Canada declared her adult status. And in 1893, when the time came to choose the first Archbishop and Primate of all Canada, it was a proud day for little St. John's Cathedral. Its bishop was chosen unanimously.

His death in March, 1904, was a loss to all Rupert's Land, to all Canada, to all the Church of Christ. True words may be read upon his gravestone at St. John's. "He fed them with a faithful and true heart, and ruled them prudently with all his power."

Pioneer Days in the Western Church

The story of the early days is done. Perhaps it has seemed too much a record of "doings" at headquarters, forgetful of the saints and servants who labored in far places. Of the priests who spent half their Sunday in Church and the other half in the saddle, the catechists and Indian missionaries, the worried archdeacons, the travelling students establishing new missions and prodding into life the ones that winter had made dormant, the school teachers, the men who built the churches and the schools, the poor men's pence as well as the rich men's gifts that made the work possible. One cannot relate in a few pages the chronicle of a land as big as Russia. Other and better informed writers will fill out the bald facts of the last paragraph. Nor has a newcomer the courage to tell the varied story of the present century. All men know of the cataclysmic misfortunes that befell our Church in 1933—a later historian will have a task more hard than mine. In 1933 we start to pioneer again.

